

Australia cannot end gender-based violence in a generation while women are forced to 'choose' between violence and homelessness

YWCA Australia's submission for the *Second Action Plan* to the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032

Ending gender-based violence in one generation: A gendered, intersectional and whole-of-systems approach to prevention, safety and healing

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I. Executive Summary

YWCA Australia (YWCA) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the development of the **Second Action Plan under the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032**.

YWCA's submission comes from the lens of housing and homelessness as it interacts with the safety of women and children. We support this position within our expertise as providers of community housing and specialist homelessness services to women and children, and through our research and advocacy in collaboration with young women and gender-diverse people and lived experience experts.

Australia has invested billions of dollars, built new programs and services, strengthened policy frameworks and elevated violence against women and children as a national priority. Yet women's safety remains one of the country's most persistent and urgent challenges. The lesson is not that investment has failed or that significant further investment is not required. It is that we cannot expect fundamentally different outcomes if we continue to work through fragmented systems, programs and funding streams that respond to different parts of the same problem in isolation.

The Second Action Plan must therefore mark a shift from a collection of initiatives towards a whole-of-system reform agenda. Preventing and responding to gender-based violence requires coordinated action across housing and homelessness, justice, health, social services, income support, education and economic security. These systems must work together around the safety, recovery and long-term wellbeing of victim-survivors, while strengthening accountability for people who use violence.

Housing is one of the clearest places where the consequences of failing to connect these systems are felt. Australia cannot end gender-based violence in a generation while women are forced to choose between violence and homelessness. A victim-survivor's ability to leave, establish safety and rebuild her life depends not only on the effectiveness of the specialist violence response, but on whether the systems around it provide a viable pathway to safe, secure and affordable housing.

The Second Action Plan marks an important opportunity for victim-survivors which must be seized and acted upon by Australian governments. In the words of one of YWCA Australia's lived experience advocates in Darwin:

“This Action Plan must be more than a document.

It needs to deliver real, measurable outcomes that improve safety, increase access to support, provide safe and affordable housing, invest in prevention and healing, and genuinely embed lived experience leadership in decision-making.

Communities need to see and feel the difference. Lives depend on it.”

- YWCA Australia Amplifying Voices program participant.

Housing as Violence Prevention Infrastructure

This is why YWCA argues that safe, secure and affordable housing must be recognised as **violence prevention infrastructure**. Housing is not ancillary to the National Plan, nor is it simply a downstream response once violence has occurred. It is part of the enabling infrastructure that gives victim-survivors genuine choices, reduces the structural conditions that can prolong exposure to abuse, and supports safety, recovery and economic independence.

This does not mean that housing insecurity causes gender-based violence, or that housing alone will end it. Violence is driven by gender inequality and by attitudes, behaviours, institutions and systems that enable power and control. Housing and economic insecurity can, however, deepen dependence, constrain the ability to leave, prolong exposure to abuse, continue the cycle of coercive controlling behaviours and undermine recovery. A serious national strategy that takes a whole-of-government approach must therefore address both the gendered drivers of violence and the structural conditions that determine whether victim-survivors have agency and dignity to make the ultimate choice to leave a violent home.

The resounding evidence demonstrates how deeply the housing and violence systems intersect. In 2024–25, specialist homelessness services assisted around 117,000 clients who had experienced family and domestic violence, around 40 per cent of all specialist homelessness services clients. Around 46,800 of these clients were experiencing homelessness when they first presented, and nearly half were living in single-parent families. These are not two separate policy populations. They are substantially the same people moving through systems that remain divided by portfolio, eligibility, funding and accountability.ⁱ

This intersection illustrates the broader challenge the Second Action Plan must confront. Whole-of-system reform does not require every portfolio to control every lever. It requires government to establish shared outcomes and ensure that the portfolios, programs and funding systems that influence those outcomes work together.

YWCA recognises that many of the policy and delivery levers that shape housing security sit beyond the direct remit of the Department of Social Services (DSS), including within other Commonwealth portfolios and with state and territory governments. This makes effective coordination and shared accountability across government critical to achieving the ambitions of the National Plan. The Second Action Plan provides an important opportunity to strengthen these connections, establish clearer shared outcomes and ensure that the systems influencing victim-survivor safety work together.ⁱⁱ

Within its remit, DSS is well placed to support stronger integration between housing security and the National Plan. YWCA recommends considering how existing Commonwealth DFSV programs and grant settings can strengthen pathways to housing and local support systems, including by building on the **Leaving Violence Program** to better support housing and economic security. There is also an opportunity to embed housing security within National Plan outcomes, strengthen evidence and independent monitoring through the DFSV Commission, resource lived experience

participation in implementation, and use DSS's convening role and National Plan governance to support coordinated action across relevant Commonwealth portfolios and with states and territories.

This is particularly timely. **Homes for Australia: A National Plan**, released in May 2026, is a \$47 billion national housing plan whose six priorities include growing the social and affordable housing sector and supporting people experiencing homelessness, crisis, and family and domestic violence with a strengthened system. The National Agreement on Social Housing and Homelessness (NASHH) is a \$9.3 billion, five-year intergovernmental agreement, providing around \$1.9 billion annually to states and territories, including more than \$400 million annually for homelessness which jurisdictions must match. The task is not to duplicate these existing housing investments through the Second Action Plan. It is to connect them deliberately to the outcomes Australia is seeking under the National Plan. These are existing delivery channels through which commitments negotiated under the National Plan can be translated into implementation.^{iii iv}

YWCA recommends a package of reforms that prioritises and is inclusive of:

- Recognise and invest in as essential violence prevention infrastructure;
- Connect housing, specialist support and economic security;
- Move lived experience from consultation to shared implementation power;
- Build the governance, workforce, data and accountability architecture; required to make a whole-of-system response real.

YWCA further recommends that lived experience be recognised as a source of expertise that informs both policy design and implementation, extending beyond consultation alone. We encourage the Second Action Plan to establish a trauma-informed, culturally safe, strengths-based, remunerated and ongoing mechanisms for victim-survivors, young women and gender-diverse people to identify system barriers, shape responses and contribute to assessing whether reforms are working in practice.

Recommendations at a glance

1. Formally recognise safe and secure housing as essential to preventing violence, enabling victim-survivors to leave violence safely, and supporting long-term recovery and healing, and embed housing security as a priority across the Second Action Plan.
2. Establish a nationally agreed pathway for victim-survivors to move rapidly from violence and housing crisis into safe, secure and permanent housing, with clear responsibilities across governments, coordinated access to housing and support, and measurable outcomes for housing stability.
3. Ensure that investment in early intervention and prevention initiatives is increased to be commensurate to the scale of the crisis of domestic, family and sexual violence. Moreover, to match the priority focus on intervening and preventing violence to achieve our goal of ending gender-based violence in one generation.
4. Prioritise children and young people as clients in their own rights. Ensure that in recognising that children and young people are victim-survivors in their own right, that they also have the right to services for themselves. This requires funding and supports specifically for children and young people. This is essential primary prevention and intervention infrastructure to break intergenerational cycles of abuse and to replace them with intergenerational cycles of uplift.
5. Secure a cross-portfolio gender-responsive housing investment commitment through **Homes for Australia** and future **Housing Australia** programs, with transparent reporting against need and outcomes.
6. Incentivise Commonwealth-supported housing investment for victim-survivors to be linked with multi-year operational funding for specialist support and service integration, including through funding agreements and co-investment arrangements with states and territories.
7. Strengthen and evaluate flexible, survivor-directed financial assistance and expand the application of the Leaving Violence Program to better support housing stability, economic security and access to local services.
8. Use Commonwealth commissioning and intergovernmental agreements to drive longer-term, properly indexed specialist DFSV funding.
9. Move lived experience from consultation to implementation governance through remunerated national and place-based structures, with transparent feedback loops and decision rights. Ensure that lived experience expertise is strengthened across the governance mechanisms of the Second Action Plan.
10. Prioritise the role of services and people with lived experience in designing holistic models and action plans at the regional and local level to ensure that responses meet the needs of victim-survivors in their communities.

11. Embed formal alignment with ***Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices*** and resource First Nations-led implementation.
12. Build a practical “tell your story once” system integration model through coordinated case management, warm referral, safe information sharing and interoperability across key service systems.
13. Shift measurement beyond program activity and housing outputs to whether victim-survivors are safer, remain securely housed and experience improved economic security and recovery. Embed these outcomes in the Second Action Plan reporting monitoring and evaluation tool and use them to hold governments accountable for whether investment is improving people’s lives.
14. Strengthen the DFSV Commission’s independent monitoring role by requiring governments to publicly respond to systemic barriers it identifies, including barriers to safe and secure housing, and report on action taken through the Second Action Plan.

II. About YWCA Australia

YWCA is a national feminist organisation and Tier 2 Community Housing Provider with more than 140 years of experience supporting women, gender-diverse people and their families. We build, buy and manage social and affordable housing, deliver specialist homelessness, domestic and family violence and early intervention services, create pathways for young women's leadership and voice, and advocate for systems change.

Nationally, YWCA provides more than 500 safe homes and manages 553 active social and affordable housing tenancies. Through 27 specialist programs across 19 operational locations, we support more than 6,000 people each year, providing over 130,000 nights of accommodation and 64,000 hours of specialist support annually.

Our point of difference is that **we do the doing**. Our housing and frontline services give us direct insight into how housing insecurity, homelessness, gender-based violence and economic insecurity intersect in people's lives. We see where systems work, where people fall between them, and where policy, funding and service responses need to be better connected.

We combine this frontline experience with gender expertise, lived experience, research and economic evidence to identify practical solutions and advocate for systems change. Our **[Housing That Pays Back](#)** research demonstrates the broader value of this approach, finding an average \$2.02 in measurable public benefit for every \$1 invested in YWCA housing, alongside an estimated \$6.3 million in avoided health and justice expenditure annually.

Lived experience is also embedded in how YWCA develops its advocacy and contributes to policy conversations. Through our [Young Women's Council](#), [Digital Activist Community](#) and [Amplifying Voices](#) program, young women, gender-diverse people and people with lived experience have structured pathways to identify system barriers and influence policy and decision-making. This submission has been informed by those perspectives, including consultation with our Amplifying Voices advocates in the Northern Territory.^v

This combination of housing delivery, specialist services, gender expertise, research and lived experience informs YWCA's contribution to the Second Action Plan and our central proposition that **safe and secure housing is essential infrastructure for preventing and responding to gender-based violence**.

III. Principles for a stronger whole-of-system response

The Second Action Plan consultation paper recognises that the next phase of implementing the **National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032** requires coordinated action across prevention, early intervention, response, recovery and healing. Its proposed focus on “System Integration and Workforce” reflects the reality that victim-survivors do not experience government systems in isolation. They may interact with specialist domestic, family and sexual violence services alongside housing, health, policing, justice, income support, education and child protection systems, often at the same time.ⁱⁱ Drawing on our experience as a housing provider, specialist service provider and advocacy organisation, and on the expertise of people with lived experience, we recommend that the following principles guide the development and implementation of the Second Action Plan.

Maintain a strong gendered analysis of violence

Gender-based violence is both a manifestation and a mechanism of gender inequality. The Second Action Plan provides an important opportunity to maintain a clear focus on the gendered drivers of violence, including unequal power, rigid gender norms, misogyny, sexual violence and coercive control. A strong gendered analysis should also avoid reinforcing rigid gender binaries that can obscure the experiences of trans, gender-diverse and non-binary people and create barriers to appropriate and safe responses.

This analysis is strengthened when it recognises that gender does not operate in isolation. Colonisation, racism, disability, poverty, migration and visa status, age, sexuality, gender identity and geography can shape exposure to violence, access to resources, experiences of institutions and the consequences when systems fail.

Translate intersectionality into how systems work

YWCA recommends an intersectional approach that moves beyond recognising diversity and actively shapes how policies, services and pathways are designed and delivered. A pathway is not genuinely accessible if a woman with disability cannot use the service offered, a woman on a temporary visa cannot access or sustain support, a First Nations woman fears discrimination or punitive responses when seeking help, a person from a culturally or racially marginalised community encounters racism or services that are not culturally safe, a young gender-diverse person does not feel safe in a mainstream service, or someone living in a regional or remote community has no practical option available.

The effectiveness of the Second Action Plan will therefore depend not simply on whether pathways exist, but on whether they are accessible, culturally safe and responsive to the different circumstances of the people who need them.

Design around people, not portfolios

Victim-survivors experience violence and its consequences across multiple areas of their lives. Government responsibilities, funding streams and service systems are necessarily divided across portfolios, but a person seeking safety should not bear the burden of navigating those divisions.

YWCA recommends that the Second Action Plan continue to strengthen connections between the systems that determine whether a victim-survivor can become safe and remain safe. This includes clearer pathways between specialist support, housing, economic security and other mainstream systems, supported by shared responsibility across governments.

This is particularly important for housing. A crisis response may provide immediate safety, but without somewhere safe and affordable to live to support long-term healing and recovery, a victim-survivor's options can remain severely constrained. This is where we see noticeably high rates of women returning to violence in the home as they don't experience viable alternatives. Housing security is therefore not separate from the violence response. It is part of the infrastructure that enables safety, recovery and independence.

Value lived experience as expertise

People with lived experience bring knowledge about how systems operate that cannot be captured through administrative data alone. YWCA recommends that lived experience inform the design, implementation and evaluation of the Second Action Plan through ongoing, accessible and appropriately remunerated participation.

This includes creating meaningful opportunities for victim-survivors, young women and gender-diverse people to identify barriers, test whether reforms are working in practice and contribute to solutions.

Measure what changes in people's lives – the outcomes over the outputs

Strong evidence and accountability will be critical to understanding whether the Second Action Plan is achieving its objectives. Program activity, expenditure and service outputs provide important information, but they do not tell us whether people are safer or whether improvements are being experienced equally.

YWCA recommends combining quantitative evidence with qualitative lived experience expertise and disaggregated outcomes. This would provide a clearer picture of whether reform is improving safety and recovery across different communities.

Consultation with YWCA's Amplifying Voices advocates also highlighted the importance of transparency in how progress is understood, defined and communicated. Aggregate improvement can coexist with significant system failure for particular groups. A strong accountability framework can recognise progress while continuing to identify where people remain poorly served.

‘If they say if there is a success, I would say 1% out of 99% is success, because some service providers help victim-survivors ...but out of the 100%, the system is still failing when it comes to domestic violence.’- YWCA Australia Amplifying Voices program participant

Build shared responsibility for safety

No single department, level of government or service system holds all the levers required to end gender-based violence. YWCA therefore sees the National Plan as an important mechanism for bringing those responsibilities together around shared outcomes.

For the Second Action Plan, this means making the connections between portfolios visible, identifying where responsibility is shared and strengthening accountability for collective outcomes. Where important levers sit outside DSS, National Plan governance can help bring the relevant portfolios and jurisdictions together.

Safety is ultimately an outcome of systems working together. The opportunity presented by the Second Action Plan is to make those connections stronger, more deliberate and more accountable, so that victim-survivors experience a coordinated pathway to safety rather than a series of separate systems they must navigate themselves.

IV. Housing is violence prevention infrastructure

4.1 Victim-survivors are navigating housing and violence response systems simultaneously

Family and domestic violence is a leading cause of homelessness and the largest identifiable client group within specialist homelessness services. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare reports that in 2024–25 around 117,000 specialist homelessness services clients had experienced family and domestic violence, representing 40 per cent of all specialist homelessness services clients. Around 46,800 were experiencing homelessness when they first approached service, while 48 per cent were living in single-parent families.ⁱ

These figures demonstrate the significant overlap between people seeking support for violence and those requiring homelessness and housing assistance. For victim-survivors, violence, housing insecurity and economic insecurity are often experienced together, even though the policy, funding and service systems established to respond to them operate across different portfolios and jurisdictions.

The data also demonstrates the limits of crisis response without a pathway to secure housing. Among clients experiencing FDV who were homeless at the start of support and whose support period had closed, only around two in five were in stable housing by the end of the support period. Among those who presented at risk of homelessness, around one in ten were homeless at the end of the support period.ⁱ Specialist services can support immediate safety and recovery, but they cannot provide a timely, safe and secure pathway into permanent housing where suitable and affordable homes are unavailable.

YWCA recommends that the Second Action Plan strengthen the connection between specialist violence responses, homelessness services and housing pathways so that victim-survivors experience a more coordinated transition from immediate safety to secure, long-term housing. While responsibility for these responses may sit across different portfolios and levels of government, victim-survivors experience them as one pathway to safety.

4.2 Housing across the prevention continuum

Recognising housing as violence prevention infrastructure does not mean suggesting that housing insecurity causes gender-based violence or displacing the National Plan's focus on its gendered drivers. Rather, it recognises that housing security can influence whether victim-survivors have practical choices and material resources to become safe and remain safe.

Domain	What housing contributes
Primary prevention	Housing and economic security support autonomy and reduce structural dependence, increasing the material choices available to people experiencing violence while maintaining responsibility for violence with the person using it.
Early intervention	Tenancy protections, flexible financial assistance, safety upgrades, housing advocacy and earlier access to stable housing can help prevent violence from resulting in homelessness and crisis.
Response	Crisis and transitional accommodation provide essential immediate safety but work best when connected to a viable pathway into safe, secure, long-term housing. Victim-survivor advocates at YWCA Australia have called for crisis and transitional accommodation to respond to current gaps, including the need for accommodation for older boys who are often excluded from women's refuges, and supports to keep women and their children in their home where the perpetrator chooses to leave the family home and receive support.
Recovery and healing	Permanent housing provides a stable foundation for recovery, including health and wellbeing, employment and education, parenting and connection to community.

Viewed across this continuum, housing is not simply a downstream response once violence has occurred. It is an enabling condition that can strengthen prevention and early intervention, support immediate safety and provide the foundation for sustained recovery and long-term healing. YWCA recommends that the Second Action Plan recognise this role and more deliberately connect housing responses with actions across the prevention continuum.

4.3 The benefits of housing investment extend across government

YWCA's ***Housing That Pays Back*** analysis, developed with Per Capita's Centre for Equitable Housing, estimates an average benefit-cost ratio of \$2.02 for every \$1 invested in YWCA housing, rising to \$4.66 in a family reunification scenario. These benefits extend beyond housing, including avoided or reduced costs across health, justice and homelessness systems, alongside improved wellbeing and participation.^{vi}

For the Second Action Plan, this evidence highlights an important whole-of-government consideration. While responsibility for housing investment sits across different portfolios and jurisdictions, the benefits of housing stability are shared across government, as are the costs when people remain unsafe or experience prolonged homelessness and housing insecurity.

YWCA therefore recommends that the Second Action Plan recognise gender-responsive housing as enabling social infrastructure and support stronger consideration of these cross-portfolio benefits when governments develop and assess investments intended to improve victim-survivor safety and recovery.

V. Using the *National Plan* to connect across government

The ambition of the Second Action Plan will necessarily extend beyond the policy and program levers held directly by DSS. Housing supply and allocation, tenancy law, justice, health and many frontline services sit across other Commonwealth portfolios, state and territory governments and different funding arrangements.

YWCA recognises these institutional responsibilities and recommends that the Second Action Plan make them more visible, rather than allowing them to become gaps between systems. This means distinguishing between actions DSS can progress directly and those that require cross-portfolio or intergovernmental partnership, with clear responsibility for how each commitment will be advanced.

As the lead Commonwealth agency for the National Plan, DSS is well placed to contribute through three complementary roles: using the policy and program levers within its remit, convening action across the Commonwealth, and supporting coordinated implementation with states and territories. This approach does not suggest that DSS assume responsibility for levers held elsewhere. Rather, it recognises the value of the National Plan as a mechanism for connecting those responsibilities around shared outcomes for victim-survivors.

Noting the levers within and outside of the DSS, we recommend clear funding allocations and cross-departmentally through the National Plan and the Second Action Plan. We also recommend increased and sustained investment from the Commonwealth and States and Territories through the National Partnership Agreement on Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence Responses. At the heart of these commitments, should be security and sustainability of funding for services and the communities that they support across the nation.

YWCA recommends that consideration of actions for the Second Action Plan be guided by whether a particular lever is important to achieving the National Plan's outcomes, rather than solely by whether DSS controls that lever directly. Where responsibility sits elsewhere, the Plan can identify the relevant government actor, establish the connection to the National Plan outcome and provide a mechanism through which progress can be monitored.

This approach is particularly relevant to housing. Existing housing investment, homelessness agreements and state and territory delivery systems provide mechanisms through which housing outcomes can be advanced. The opportunity is to better connect these mechanisms with the objectives of the National Plan and make responsibility for those connections visible.

The same principle applies to lived experience. Existing National Plan architecture already provides important foundations through the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission and its Lived Experience Advisory Council. YWCA recommends building on this architecture by creating stronger pathways for lived experience expertise to inform implementation, monitoring and evaluation, including through place-based approaches, and for participants to see how their advice has influenced decisions.

Sphere	What DSS can do	Delivery partners
Direct policy and program levers	Embed housing and economic security within relevant National Plan outcomes; strengthen connections between Commonwealth DFSV programs, housing pathways and local services; build on the Leaving Violence Program; support lived experience participation; and strengthen research, evaluation and workforce capability.	DFSV Commission, Services Australia, ANROWS, funded service providers and relevant Commonwealth agencies.
Cross-portfolio coordination	Use existing Commonwealth governance and ministerial processes to connect Second Action Plan commitments with the portfolios responsible for housing, income support, justice, health and digital safety, including identifying responsibility for delivery and monitoring progress. ^{vii}	Treasury, Housing Australia, Attorney-General's Department, Health, Finance, eSafety and other Commonwealth agencies
Intergovernmental coordination	Use National Plan governance to support nationally consistent outcomes and stronger connections between violence responses, housing and homelessness systems and other services, while allowing implementation to respond to different jurisdictional and local contexts.	States and territories, housing and homelessness agencies, justice and health systems, community housing and specialist service sectors.

5.1 Existing machinery makes this achievable

Homes for Australia already provides an important national policy bridge. Released by Commonwealth Treasury on 28 May 2026, the \$47 billion plan is intended to focus effort across government and strengthen coordination across jurisdictions. One of its six priorities specifically focuses on supporting people experiencing homelessness, crisis, and family and domestic violence through a strengthened system.ⁱⁱⁱ YWCA recommends building on this alignment through the Second Action Plan by identifying measurable commitments that connect housing investment with victim-survivor safety and recovery outcomes.

The **National Agreement on Social Housing and Homelessness** (NASHH) provides another established intergovernmental delivery mechanism. The \$9.3 billion, five-year agreement provides around \$1.9 billion annually to states and territories, including more than \$400 million for homelessness funding that jurisdictions are required to match. It is supported by a National Outcomes Framework and already reflects Closing the Gap commitments.^{iv}

YWCA recommends that National Plan governance be used to identify housing and safety outcomes that could inform relevant NASHH implementation, review and future arrangements, in partnership with Treasury and states and territories. Housing Australia programs provide a further existing pathway, including dedicated crisis and transitional housing investment for women and children experiencing domestic and family violence alongside broader social and affordable housing programs.^{iv} There is an opportunity to

connect this existing housing investment more deliberately with the safety, support and recovery outcomes sought through the Second Action Plan.

DSS also has an important existing lever through the ***Leaving Violence Program***. The program provides eligible victim-survivors of intimate partner violence with up to \$5,000 in financial support, alongside risk assessment, safety planning and referral support for up to 12 weeks, with national delivery and regional First Nations-led trials.^{viii} YWCA recommends building on this existing investment by strengthening its contribution to longer-term housing and economic security, including clearer connections with housing pathways and local service systems. This would extend the impact of an established DSS program rather than requiring a new payment architecture.

VI. Governance: Moving lived experience from consultation to shared implementation power

YWCA welcomes the increased recognition of lived and living experience within national DFSV policy. The next opportunity is to deepen this approach by recognising lived experience not only as a source of insight, but as expertise that can contribute to policy design, implementation and accountability.

The term lived experience leadership is increasingly quoted but seldom defined. At YWCA Australia, we draw upon the insights of Morgan Cataldo and colleagues from their work *On Our Own Terms*:

“Lived Experience Leadership is a transformative social movement that operates across both formal and informal spaces to restore justice and drive systemic change. It builds relationships, coalitions and movements within and beyond organisations, recognising the political nature of the personal and confronting epistemic and structural injustices – including colonisation.

Leaders draw on their lived expertise to innovate, influence and create meaningful impact with and for the communities they represent. This leadership challenges dominant power structures, reimagines how systems function and repositions lived knowledge as central – rather than secondary – to social change.”^x

People with lived experience understand how systems operate in practice such as where pathways break down, where policies create unintended consequences, what is needed at the point of crisis and whether reforms meaningfully improve the experience of seeking safety. Creating opportunities for this expertise to shape decisions throughout implementation can strengthen both the design and effectiveness of reform.

“We understand the complexity of each survivor’s journey and the value of exchanging the knowledge from our experiences to lead and advocate for meaningful change. Together we can be the most powerful agents for preventing and responding to family, domestic and sexual violence, and homelessness.”- YWCA Australia Amplifying Voices program participant

“We’re not just telling our stories, we’re helping shape the solutions.”- YWCA Australia Amplifying Voices program participant

This also requires greater transparency about how lived experience influences decisions. Repeatedly asking people to share experiences of violence without demonstrating what changed as a result risks becoming extractive. Participation is more meaningful when people can see how their expertise has informed a decision, why particular advice has or has not been adopted, and what happens next.

Consultation with Amplifying Voices advocates in the Northern Territory also highlighted the importance of combining national direction with locally responsive

implementation. Geography, cultural identity, population, service availability and community relationships vary significantly across Australia, particularly in regional and remote communities.

A core recommendation of Amplifying Voices advocates is the establishment of Local Action Plans which sit at the community level, and which could sit with local services and organisations. These Local Action Plans would be informed by communities – including people with lived experience within those communities. Local Action Plans would be a practical mechanism to ensure that actions to end violence against women and children are tailored to the specific needs of each community.

‘Each community needs to have their own individual action plan relating to their location, population, service providers and cultural identity and background.’- YWCA Australia Amplifying Voices program participant

Local Action Plans, informed by victim-survivors, would be a core mechanism to realising national ambitions to end violence in a generation. ***‘Victim-survivors are the experts in their own experiences. They understand what meaningful change looks like, what barriers still exist and whether policies and programs are making a genuine difference in people’s lives. Their perspectives help ensure that actions are not only well-intentioned but are also practical, accessible and responsive to community needs.’ - YWCA Australia Amplifying Voices program participant***

Australian governments have the goal to end violence in a generation. This ambitious goal can only be realised if reciprocal relationships are built with victim-survivors, and women and children in communities across Australia. The goal must be power-building and power-sharing to ensure that people with lived experience are at the centre of identifying the barriers, designing the policy responses, and overseeing the implementation and evaluation of policies and investment decisions.

6.1 Recommendations: Lived Experience power-building and power-sharing

YWCA recommends that the Second Action Plan establish a national lived experience participation standard covering remuneration, trauma-informed and culturally safe engagement, accessibility, feedback and participation throughout implementation and evaluation. This could build on the DFSV Commission’s Lived Experience Advisory Council and Monitoring and Reporting Framework, while supporting the development of lived experience leadership capability.

There is also an opportunity to complement this national architecture with funded place-based partnerships that enable lived experience leaders to shape implementation around local conditions, particularly in regional and remote communities. These partnerships could test approaches to shared decision-making and provide a pathway for effective local models to inform broader reform.

Finally, YWCA recommends that policies, programs and implementation models be tested with the people expected to use them before they are scaled. This is standard practice across many government portfolios, and areas of service and product design. Applying the same principle to DFSV policy would help identify barriers and unintended

consequences earlier, while ensuring reforms work in practice for the people they are intended to support.

“Lived experience leaders bring insight, strength and authenticity to this work.

By sharing their knowledge and perspectives, they can help shape services and systems that are more responsive, compassionate and effective. Their leadership also gives others hope, showing that healing and recovery are possible and empowering victim-survivors to find their voices, seek support and know they are not alone.

Lived experience leadership turns personal experiences into meaningful change, helping to prevent future violence and support the healing of individuals, families and communities.”– YWCA Amplifying Voices program participant.

6.2 Further Embedding Lived Experience Expertise in the National Plan Governance Framework and in the Design, Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation of the Second Action Plan

The Federal Government has extensively engaged with people with lived experience and the services that support them in this consultation process. We note that these engagements with lived experience experts and services can and should continue across the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Second Action Plan.^x By embedding lived experience voices through these processes, the solutions designed and the evaluations captured will be more robust.

“Lived experience leadership should be embedded throughout the design, implementation and evaluation of the Action Plan. Success should be measured not only by statistics but also by whether people feel safer, are able to access support more easily, have stable housing, experience improved wellbeing and feel heard, respected and empowered throughout their recovery and healing journey. Nothing about us should be decided or evaluated without us”– YWCA Amplifying Voices program participant.

The Government can also utilise this Second Action Plan as an opportunity to strengthen lived experience expertise within its governance infrastructure for the National Plan. For example:

- The work and weight of the DFSV Commission and its Lived Experience Advisory Council can be expanded in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Second Action Plan. The expertise of lived experience can expand in decision-making body environments, in addition to advisory body settings under the National Plan governance arrangements.
- The DFSV Commission could receive increased funding to increase engagement with victim-survivors in communities across the nation, reaching those who may not traditionally be at the table, and working with services that support victim-survivors and lived experience leaders.

- The DFSV Commission Lived Experience Advisory Council role can be expanded to advise and support decision-making across the governance structure of the National Plan. This includes having greater input from the bottom up in working with Women and Women's Safety Senior Officials, Commonwealth Ending Gender-based Violence Inter-Departmental Committee, the Commonwealth National Plan Implementation Committee, and the Women and Women's Safety Ministerial Council, as well as the Minister for Social Services.
- The Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Advisory Council can include additional non-government actors – including lived experience experts and organisations that provide domestic, family and sexual violence services.

VII. Reviewing the Evidence:

7.1 Lived Experience Expertise across problem and solution identification

In consulting with lived experience experts in our Amplifying Voices program, these advocates from Darwin highlight the importance of truth-telling in the Second Action Plan. There needs to be a victim-survivor lens over the identification and reporting of the evidence. To address violence against women and children governments must foreground where the failings are and how systems contribute to those harms. From that point, governments can work backwards to design the policy responses and programmatic investments. Lived experience expertise must be applied across the spectrum from the issue identification to the target and response design, to the monitoring and evaluation of implementation.

Lived experience involvement is also critical to ensuring that the evidence is distributed in a means that is reflective of the victim-survivor experience and understanding and respectful and dignified to other victim-survivors. For example, the evidence review summary that “most forms of violence have declined” and “rates of deaths from intimate partner violence have been declining over time” was questioned both for accuracy but also for the messaging to victim-survivors for whom this plan is intended to support.

Whilst we remain in a national crisis of violence against women and children, it is confronting for victim-survivors to see a starting point of ‘progress’ where on-the-ground the experience reflects persistent harms. It is also confronting that ‘progress’ is attributed without wording acknowledging that no violence is acceptable and one murder is one too many. We will not have ‘progress’ until violence, femicide and filicide against women and children ends in Australia.

“Listen to the voices of the advocates. One [death] is too many. Enough is Enough.”

– YWCA Australia Amplifying Voices program participants.

7.2 Reflections on the Evidence Review

In addition to consulting on the priority areas, we also consulted on the community and sector understanding of the ANROWS evidence review in the Consultation Summary Paper. Consistent reflections arose from the victim-survivor advocates, young women and gender-diverse people and sector specialists whom we consulted:

The Importance of Victim-Survivor Informed Assessment and Presentation of Evidence and Truth-Telling

In consulting with YWCA Australia’s Amplifying Voices advocates in the Northern Territory on the evidence review summary, a manifest learning is the importance of lived experience expertise in the assessment and presentation of evidence. Moreover, the importance of truth-telling.

In change-making, it is common-place to start from the question 'What would success look like from our reforms' or 'Where are we progressing', and work back from there on what reforms are required or still required, or where reforms are most needed. For victim-survivors of domestic, family and sexual violence, it is important to start with truth-telling. That truth-telling involves the harms that women and children are facing, as well as the systemic contribution to those harms and failings. From that point, and informed by those with lived experience expertise, we can design effective policy responses and programs to respond to and prevent domestic, family and sexual violence with the aim of ending violence against women and children in one generation.

Quantitative evidence is essential. However, we know that there are gaps in that evidence; from systemic misidentification of victim-survivors as perpetrators, particularly for First Nations women, to individual underreporting for fear of retaliatory and escalating violence and fears of systemic harms from poverty to homelessness, child removal and more. Furthermore, we know that women and children are not all affected equally, with impacts and underreporting higher for women and children who systemically face intersectional harms in addition to gender. Those women and children include women and children who are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander; migrant, multicultural and living on a visa; living in remote, regional or rural communities; people with a disability; and, people in the LGBTQIA+SB community.

An Amplifying Voices advocate, reflected on the areas, 'Where progress has been made' in the Second Action Plan Consultation Summary. She states:

"If they say if there is a success, I would say 1% out of 99% is success, because some service providers help victim-survivors... and then the perpetrator is in jail or he serves his consequences.

So, there is the possibility of success there, but out of the 100%, the system is still failing when it comes to domestic violence."

- YWCA Australia Amplifying Voices program participant

This reflection has dual learnings – where there is success is systemically finite, and the beneficiaries of success are systemically unequal. Another Amplifying Voices advocate and victim-survivor continued the reflection by noting the unequal outcomes that are experienced by people living in rural and regional and particularly remote areas.

There is inequality in outcome experienced within the Northern Territory and the Amplifying Voices advocates reflect that this is not being resolved by umbrella solutions with insufficient resourcing across the Territory. As will be discussed further regarding **Priority Area 2: Prevention and Early Intervention** below, place-based engagements and solutions are the leading recommendation by lived experience advocates in YWCA Australia's Amplifying Voices program in Darwin.

The sum total of these gaps presents the irrefutable importance of assessing and presenting evidence with qualitative expertise informed by the lived experience of victim-survivors of domestic, family and sexual violence.

Most forms of violence have declined and Rates of death from intimate partner violence have been declining over time

Lived and Sector Experience Querying the Data:

As mentioned above, the evidence review summary that “most forms of violence have declined” and “rates of deaths from intimate partner violence have been declining over time” was questioned both for accuracy but also for the messaging to victim-survivors for whom this plan is intended to support.

Members of YWCA Australia’s Young Women’s Council and Amplifying Voices program, as well as specialist homelessness and domestic family and sexual violence services providers have questioned this position and the data relied upon to reach it.

For lived experience expertise advocates, the findings around rates of violence and deaths declining **“really doesn’t seem to match reality.”** Questions arose on the data relied upon, and whether weight has appropriately been given to the high rates of under-reporting.

For specialist services workers, the finding that rates of violence are declining also doesn’t match their experience. One service leader noted that the rates of violence should be increasing to reflect the increase in culture and community knowledge that financial abuse and coercive control is violence, and that data should not be limited to physical violence incidents. At a regional level BOCSAR and services are looking at increases in coercive control incidents and recognising that a core reason for this trend is an increase in awareness within the community that coercive control is a form of family violence and are reporting it. Specialist workers also questioned the finding that rates of deaths from intimate partner violence are declining and queried the ages and use of population data to determine this finding.

Further information around this data points, and consultation with lived experience expertise and sector expertise on analysing and presenting the data is essential.

Intersectional gaps:

Other gaps were recognised by YWCA Australia’s Young Women’s Council in the evidence presented:

- Women with disability were not represented under the section where outcomes are not equal, despite this being a grave concern, particularly around disability-based homicide of children in regions of Australia. Consistent language which acknowledges the intersections of those most impacted by domestic, family and sexual violence, including those with disability, is essential.
- Outcomes for children in out-of-home care and adults who were children in out-of-home care, rather than with kinship are also not presented in the evidence. A Young Women’s Council member noted the **“intersection between First Nations people, complex trauma, and growing up in out-of-home care...and DV”** and the comparison to kinship care. She noted that it **“would be very informative to see it**

laid out, emphasizing the links between intersections and various points.”Whilst there is a standalone First Nations plan, it is essential that First Nations women, children and gender-diverse people are also centred in this Action Plan.

Underreporting and missing women:

YWCA Australia’s Amplifying Voices advocates in the Northern Territory are acutely aware of the issues around reporting and identification of murdered women. They question the evidence on deaths from intimate partner violence declining and the weight that is attributed to capturing underreporting. We know there are issues around reporting, identification and missing women which add to the rates of deaths from intimate partner violence. This violence disproportionately impacts First Nations women and children. We highlight the focus on this violence within ***Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices***, and note that these reflections should be bolstered in the Second Action Plan:

‘Missing and murdered women and girls and their families Too many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women have been murdered or disappeared, leaving families to pick up the pieces. Many women who are murdered are mothers, leaving children to grow up without their mother’s love, guidance and protection. Too often, families alone must advocate for justice—work that should be led by police and victim support agencies. This increases their trauma and highlights systemic racism in circumstances where victims are not seen as ‘worthy’ and are given no or less attention than non-Indigenous women who are murdered, including by the media. The Senate Inquiry into Missing and Murdered First Nations Women and Children highlighted the inadequate response of police and justice systems in responding to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women’s experience of violence. Families require culturally safe and responsive support in their search for justice and healing.”^{xiii}

The link between the rise of technology-facilitated abuse as a form of intimate partner violence and the risk to a rise in femicides

Domestic, family and sexual violence is taking on new forms with technology facilitated abuse and gender-based violence. Young women and gender-diverse people and children are growing up in an unprecedented environment where abuse exists not only in-person but online. This is a new frontier of abuse perpetrated predominantly by those men closest to women, gender-diverse people and children.

The realities of technology-facilitated abuse feed a broader pattern of increases in coercive control, which are the predictive factor for 99% of femicide. These are crimes and harms happening every day, everywhere against women, gender-diverse and children. However, this abuse is not inevitable.

VIII. Response to the consultation priority areas

The following section responds directly to the consultation questions posed in ***Evidence to action: informing direction for the Second Action Plan***.

In consulting with YWCA Australia's service leaders, they note that whilst distinct priority areas are valuable, individuals and families will cross the priority areas and groups. When considering outputs and outcomes and the implementation of the plan, a practical lens should be adopted to recognise that individuals may cross multiple priority areas and that a whole-of-family response crossing multiple priority areas will often be required.

8.1 Priority Area 1 | Victim-survivors

In addition to the responses in this section, we refer to the Appendix: ***Amplifying Voices Assessment of Interventions and Strategies Paper*** at the end of this submission. The paper responds to the key problem statement that women experiencing Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence, struggle to access safe, clear and coordinated support, leaving many to navigate systems alone and face ongoing violence and trauma. The paper was developed by participants in YWCA Australia's lived experience advocacy group in Darwin, Northern Territory, Amplifying Voices. The advocates have identified key themes, root problems and causes, the impacts on women and children, and practical solutions to address barriers to accessing support. That evidence is presented clearly for the Department in a table format.

What service or system responses would make the biggest difference to victim-survivors' safety, wellbeing, healing and recovery?

The biggest difference would be a system that can provide safety without creating another crisis. Victim-survivors should have a rapid pathway to safe, permanent housing and coordinated support, underpinned by a no-wrong-door approach across DFSV, housing, homelessness, health, income support, disability, legal, child protection and migration systems.

The Second Action Plan should establish a national housing-and-safety outcome, with jurisdictions reporting the time victim-survivors spend in crisis or transitional accommodation, the proportion exiting to permanent housing, tenancy sustainment, repeat homelessness and repeat victimisation. A national outcome is more defensible than a rigid national time limit because housing markets and service systems differ, but it still creates transparency about whether crisis responses lead to long-term safety.

DSS can commit to the outcome and reporting expectation within the Second Action Plan; broker agreement with jurisdictions; work with Treasury to incorporate aligned measures into NASHH review and successor arrangements; and ensure Commonwealth DFSV programs collect the referral and outcome data needed to understand whether participants secure stable housing.

What helps people access support earlier, and what barriers prevent people from seeking help or engaging with systems and services?

Shifting the onus and active listening

Victim-survivors carry a significant onus without the guarantee of receiving support or justice.

Many victim-survivors present signs of domestic, family and sexual violence across multiple systems and services. This includes signs presented by children in schools, and women attending GPs or contacting their banks or insurers. It is important that we are conscious of the heavy onus on victim-survivors and ensuring that when signs are present and where help is sought, that systems and services are willing and able to respond in a trauma-informed and meaningful way.

‘Listen to the victims. Usually, they’ll tell you what they need. It’s up to services to actively Listen and know what to do for that individual or family. Simply ask questions, you’ll get answers.’ – YWCA Australia Amplifying Voices program participant.

Building trust and reaching community

Early access depends on trust, practical options and low administrative burden. A person is less likely to disclose violence where disclosure may lead to homelessness, financial crisis, child removal, discrimination, loss of visa security or repeated exposure to systems that have previously failed them. For some First Nations women, migrant and refugee women, women with disability and LGBTIQ+ people, distrust is grounded in experience rather than misunderstanding.

Amplifying Voices advocates also emphasised the importance of discreet, culturally and linguistically appropriate information in places where people can access it safely. Their examples included information placed in private spaces such as bathroom facilities and resources provided in languages reflecting the local community. The broader lesson is that help-seeking pathways should be designed around how people can safely encounter and act on information, rather than assuming they will approach a specialist service directly.

Amplifying Voices advocates provided practical strategies to increase promotion and awareness of available services in community: ***‘Simple, practical strategies can make a significant difference. For example, placing information and contact numbers on the back of toilet doors in public places, workplaces, schools, shopping centres and community facilities can provide people with a discreet and safe way to access information when they may not be able to seek help openly.’***

Increasing advocates and support people

In consulting with YWCA Australia's Digital Activist Community, a barrier was addressed by young women and gender-diverse people to advocating for supports and services in needing to do so in isolation, whilst overwhelmed by domestic, family and sexual violence and to services that are under-resourced. Therefore, it is essential that the resources and support people are available to guide victim-survivors through the

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process and to support their engagements with services and advocacy for supports. On the ground this would look like **“advocates of multiple cultures and backgrounds that can inform and provide guidance...someone who looks like you and experiences the nuances of your perspectives is so much more helpful and useful.”**– YWCA Australia Digital Activist Community member.

YWCA Australia’s Young Women’s Council echoed these barriers and solutions, highlighting the importance of making **“support personable – often a missing piece when victim-survivors first think of getting support.”**YWCA Australia Young Women’s Council member.

Increasing access to psychological supports and services for victim-survivors nationally

Australia has high rates of domestic, family and sexual violence. The reality is that not all victim-survivors will seek supports through formal domestic, family and sexual violence services and programs. However, all victim-survivors deserve access to supports, including for healing and recovery. Therefore, it is essential that we look more broadly at support that can be offered to victim-survivors in community. For example, by increasing funding and accessibility to therapy, and by investing in community leaders who are supporting this work in their communities outside of formal services. These women often include migrant and multicultural leaders and First Nations Aunties.

Programs and responses to strengthen

The **Leaving Violence Program** is an important DSS-controlled intervention because it recognises the financial barrier to leaving. YWCA recommends strengthening its connection to housing and local support systems through formal housing referral pathways, better agency-referral integration, evaluation of housing outcomes at 6, 12 and 24 months, and mechanisms for warm referral when the 12-week support period ends.viii

Flexible financial assistance should remain survivor directed. International evidence from Domestic Violence Housing First shows that modest flexible funding combined with mobile, survivor-driven advocacy can improve housing stability and safety.xi Australia should test how flexible assistance can complement the Leaving Violence Program, particularly for costs that fall between program categories such as bond, relocation, safety modifications, transport, replacement devices, childcare and employment needs.

The Safe & Together Model is an international, perpetrator pattern-based framework for transforming how systems and practitioners respond to domestic abuse and threats to child wellbeing. It applies a child-centered, strengths-based, and systems-informed approach that shifts the focus from blaming protective caregivers—usually mothers—to holding perpetrators accountable as parents. This is a strengths-based model which centres the needs and best interests of women and children. This model is adopted by YWCA Australia’s domestic and family violence services team.

We recommend that the Safe & Together model is expanded to improve shared language and responses to domestic abuse and threats to child wellbeing. This language could inform community education campaigns, and should be extended from

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services to whole-of-system responses, including policing and other government responses. This would increase coordination and the centring of victim-survivors and children as victim-survivors in their own right.

A new programmatic approach: adopting the Communities for Children model for responses to domestic and family violence

In recognising that individuals and families will cross priority areas, YWCA Australia's service leaders suggested the funding of a new programmatic approach in extending a Communities for Children type model to domestic and family violence service responses.

The Communities for Children model is an Australian Government Department of Social Services early intervention initiative focusing on Facilitating Partners, Community Partners, and local committees. It uses a place-based, whole-of-community approach to improve the health, wellbeing, and early development of children aged 0 to 12 years (and up to age 18 in select frameworks) living in disadvantaged areas.

The following learnings and model could be extended in a pilot to domestic and family violence prevention and intervention as follows:

- A Facilitating Partner exists within a region, working with Community Partners and local committees to coordinate improvements across system integration around responses to victim-survivor women and children and responses to perpetrators using violence.
- Adopting the Communities for Children values, the best interests of the child are at the centre of service delivery and coordinated improvements.
- Adopting the Communities for Children approach, services are delivered to families and children which brings them into view before crisis occurs. For example, parenting groups and homework clubs, which encourage supports for parents, positive engagements by fathers, and whole-of-family engagement and support.
- Having the flexibility to provide case coordination with the person using violence, so the whole-of-family unit can be supported. This recognises the need to make women and children as safe as possible at home, and the need to address the behaviours of people using violence at home. Whilst victim-survivors should always receive support to leave a situation of violence, they should still receive support if they are in an unsafe home.
- Having service co-ordination would optimise the delivery of specialised services to women, children and families across services. This could also reduce duplication of services.
- Working with local committees would enable community and lived-experience contribution and governance to responses delivered within their area. This would align with the calls from lived experience advocates for Action Plans at the local level.

What current or emerging issues should the Second Action Plan address, including in relation to coercive control and technology-facilitated abuse?

The Plan should recognise housing-based and economic coercive control, including deliberate rental debt, damage, interference with tenancy, withholding money required to sustain housing, forced relocation, use of address information to stalk a victim-survivor, and technology-enabled surveillance through devices, accounts and smart-home systems. Risk assessment and service practice should capture these forms of control alongside physical, sexual and emotional abuse.

Technology safety should also be incorporated into gender-responsive housing design and tenancy practice. For victim-survivors, a safe dwelling is not only one with locks and lighting. Digital access, privacy, address confidentiality, smart-device control and safe communications can be equally consequential.

What gaps remain in addressing the needs of diverse communities, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people?

The central gap is translating intersectionality into funded, tailored responses. Gender inequality intersects with racism, disability, migration status, geography and poverty, producing distinct forms of harm, including gendered racial violence, and compounding barriers to safety, housing and recovery.

When responding to gender inequality, we must also ensure that Sistergirls and gender-diverse people have access to support and services without discrimination and in a way that respects their identity and cultural needs.

Responses must fund the specialist capability needed to address these barriers First Nations responses should be community-controlled and aligned with ***Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices***, while mainstream systems remain accountable.^{xiii} Migrant and refugee women require responses to racial, visa and eligibility barriers; women with disability require accessible housing and services responsive to disability-related coercive control.

The Amplifying Voices members reflected on the need for a holistic approach to primary prevention for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and multicultural communities. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in remote communities in the Northern Territory, leaving their home means being removed from Country, cultural identity and belonging in their community. The Amplifying Voices members also reflected on the importance of adopting a systemic lens to address the needs of First Nations communities holistically. The role of colonisation, childhood trauma, and intergenerational trauma needs to be accounted for.

The Amplifying Voices members advocate for culturally-responsive prevention and responses to DFSV within multicultural communities. They note the compounding factors for multicultural victim-survivors based on cultural, religious and community context. This can extend amongst behaviours of extended family and within intergenerational cycles and patterns. Education for victim-survivors, perpetrators but also extended families is an essential response.

Overall, the response for Amplifying Voices members is to ensure that addressing the gaps is driven at a place-based level and informed by lived experience voices. Amplifying Voices members call upon the government to respond always to **“what the community needs, not in this one umbrella, not in a global thing...we have to do it as a local thing.”** Furthermore, **“if victims and survivors aren't involved in decision making and comparing what has and hasn't worked before, then government action plans will always have the same outcome.”** Lived experience voices must be embedded in problem and solution identification - YWCA Australia Amplifying Voices program participants.

8.2 Priority Area 2 | Prevention and early intervention

What would make the biggest difference in preventing and ultimately ending violence?

Australia must sustain the focus on the gendered drivers of violence, while broadening prevention to include the structural conditions that determine whether victim-survivors have autonomy and options. Housing and economic security are not substitutes for primary prevention, but they are part of the prevention ecosystem because they affect dependence and the capacity to act on help-seeking. Safe housing and economic security are protective factors and critical prevention infrastructure which can prevent abuse from reaching critical and crisis points.

The Second Action Plan should explicitly connect with **Working for Women** and other gender equality strategy and policy so that safety, economic equality and housing security are treated as mutually reinforcing outcomes. DSS is well placed to lead this policy connection because it is responsible for key income-support, family and violence programs and can broker the broader cross-portfolio contribution.

The overarching message YWCA Australia receives from victim-survivors, young women and gender-diverse people, and the service sector is that there must be an uplift in funding which is commensurate to the scale of the crisis. Funding needs to be uplifted across primary prevention, early intervention and crisis response. With a significant focus across governments on primary prevention outputs, there must be funding allocated to deliver the desired outcomes of primary prevention. The most effective primary prevention programs will be community and lived experience informed, place-based, culturally informed, trauma informed and holistic.

How can existing efforts to prevent violence be strengthened or built upon at the individual, community, organisational, institutional and societal levels?

Prevention needs endurance, strengthened from the individual to the community, organisation, institution and society. Respectful relationships education, gender equality initiatives, workplace prevention, community mobilisation and online safety efforts require sustained investment rather than campaign cycles. Governments should also strengthen place-based prevention where local context materially affects risk, trust and service access.

Where new measures are being introduced by the Government this should be accompanied by funding for services to support implementation in the community. This funding must be long-term and sustainable. For example, the introduction of domestic and family violence leave should be accompanied by service funding to train employers on how to offer that leave to survivors who are employees in a manner that is safe and dignified.

YWCA Australia's Amplifying Voices advocates stressed that communities need to be involved before program design is finalised, not after funding parameters have been set. DSS should pilot community-led implementation partnerships in which local lived experience leaders, services, First Nations organisations and local institutions have genuine scope to adapt delivery within national outcomes.

An Amplifying Voices advocate shared that ***“All prevention initiatives should be co-designed, developed, led and evaluated by people with lived and living experience of domestic and family violence. Victim-survivors bring invaluable knowledge, insight and expertise that cannot be replicated through professional experience alone. Their leadership ensures that strategies are relevant, culturally responsive, trauma-informed and grounded in the realities of those most affected by violence.”***

The sequencing matters. Community engagement should inform program design and funding parameters before a model is finalised, rather than government designing a program centrally and consulting communities only at the point of delivery. This is particularly important in the Northern Territory and other regional and remote settings where an 'umbrella' response may fail to reflect cultural identity, local service capacity and community-defined priorities.

The Amplifying Voices participants propose the introduction of local ***Domestic and Family Violence (DFV) Action Plans*** which can be operationalised at the service-provider and organisation level. Those plans are informed by communities with supported funding from government.

How can governments, communities, schools, workplaces, online platforms and others better support people to recognise and respond to harmful attitudes and behaviours?

Young people must be treated as co-designers of prevention in digital environments. [YWCA's Young Women's Council](#) and [Digital Activist Community](#) demonstrate a model in which young women and gender-diverse people build policy capability and engage decision-makers directly. Digital safety education should address coercive surveillance, image-based abuse, deepfakes, sexual extortion and the influence of online misogyny, while strengthening the capacity of adults and institutions to respond when young people disclose harm.

YWCA's Young Women's Council discussed the manosphere in their consultation with YWCA Australia for this Second Action Plan. Council members noted that it is important to take the next step to go from focusing on the internet platform to the ideas being shared. The ideas being shared are the root issue and cause for gender-based violence. Those ideas are then being spread and facilitated through the online platform. These ideas exist digitally but cross the digital divide. It is important that we adopt this

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nuanced lens between the ideas and the plan. We recommend that addressing the core issue of the ideas causing gender-based violence is prioritised in the Second Action Plan.

YWCA Australia notes the positive investment into campaigns around consent and child-protection from the Federal Government. We have also received feedback from younger victim-survivors that seeing ads about domestic and family violence and starting to learn about domestic and family violence even briefly in class, created the awareness that their own situation was domestic and family violence. These actions sparked a light where: ***“I saw a future where it wasn’t violent and abusive that was, very hard, but achievable.”***

The Amplifying Voices advocates call for further investment into a national DFSV campaign which aims for similar public impact as other Australian safety campaigns, such as sun or swim safety. At the community level, ***“community-led initiatives could include awareness campaigns, murals, cultural activities, community events and education programs that encourage conversations about respect, safety and healthy relationships. Investing in lived experience-led and community-driven approaches empowers communities to drive meaningful change, challenge harmful attitudes and create environments where domestic and family violence is not tolerated.”***– YWCA Australia Amplifying Voices program participant.

YWCA Australia’s Young Women’s Council also spoke to the power of resourcing grassroots organisations and campaigns from various multicultural communities who are doing the ***“great work to reach those intersectionalities in a culturally safe way.”***

Responsibility should be shared across governments, communities, schools, workplaces and online platforms to ensure that people are taught and understand the symptoms and precursors of domestic and family violence and how this may manifest in their context, for example child attendance rates at schools or performance at work. It is important that protocols are created to widen responsibility and to create systems and cultures for identifying and responding, intervening and preventing violence.

What prevention and early intervention approaches appear most promising or effective, and what is needed to strengthen or expand them?

Promising approaches share several features: they are place-based; they are sustained; they address gendered power; they are locally credible; they connect universal and specialist systems; and they intervene before crisis. The next Action Plan should prioritise rigorous evaluation and scaling of approaches that meet these criteria rather than continuing a proliferation of short pilots with no pathway to long-term funding.

For DSS, this means using grant design to require implementation learning, establishing continuation pathways for effective programs, and creating stronger connections between prevention funding and the national evidence architecture. It is essential that these processes are informed by those with lived experience to ensure that the programs and policies are most effective: ***“We have a clear understanding, we are the experts, we are able to identify system failures and co-design better models and service-delivery for survivors.”***– YWCA Australia Amplifying Voices program participant

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Amplifying Voices advocates captured the early-intervention challenge in a simple instruction: “Listen the first time” and act. This extends to listening to children as victim-survivors in their own right. When women, children and families reach out at the first signs of harm, systems should have the capability and resources to respond before violence, trauma, homelessness or system involvement escalates. Prevention therefore requires investment not only in awareness, but in the service capacity to act when awareness produces disclosure and help-seeking.

What emerging issues should the Second Action Plan address in relation to primary prevention and early intervention?

Technology-facilitated abuse, misogynistic online ecosystems and the rapid normalisation of digitally enabled coercion require greater focus. The Plan should also monitor the way cost-of-living and housing insecurity constrain safety without describing financial stress as a cause of perpetration. The emerging policy issue is that structural precarity can increase victim-survivors’ dependence at precisely the time when technology gives people using violence new tools of surveillance and control.

8.3 Priority Area 3 | Children and young people in their own right

What would make the biggest difference to improving safety, recovery and wellbeing outcomes for children and young people affected by this violence?

Recognising children and young people as victim-survivors in their own right must translate into housing and service design. Stable housing is a child safety and recovery outcome. Repeated moves, overcrowding, emergency accommodation and disconnection from school, peers, health care and community can compound trauma after violence.

YWCA Australia is a Communities for Children Facilitating Partner. Through that work, our service delivery team recognises the need for early access, earlier in life to support that is integrated and holistic. Services and responses that work with whole-of-family approaches and build a child’s relational network are paramount. These approaches produce better results than clinical services focusing on individualized or siloed supports that remove or isolates children and young people.

Consultation with Amplifying Voices advocated for greater support for children and young people to stay safe from violence through the development of more safe spaces and crisis accommodation options specifically for children and young people needing to leave home to protect themselves. Alongside housing, services should be child-centred, trauma-informed and provide holistic, wrap-around support that addresses their safety, emotional wellbeing, education and healing.

YWCA Australia provides young people at risk of or experiencing homelessness with safe accommodation and other supports in the Greater Darwin region. YWCA Australia’s CASY House is Darwin’s only youth crisis accommodation for young people aged 15-18 experiencing homelessness. We have a maximum capacity of 8 young people who can reside at CASY House. While residing at CASY House, our team support clients to learn

the necessary life skills – things like budgeting, cooking, cleaning and advocating for themselves – to establish their independence and confidence for the future. We support them to find appropriate, stable longer-term accommodation, whatever that may be. With the highest rates of domestic, family and sexual violence and homelessness in the country, the Northern Territory requires additional investment into housing and supporting children and young people experiencing violence at home.

Consultation with Amplifying Voices also reinforced that the effects of violence on children can extend well beyond the immediate period of crisis. Exposure to violence during pregnancy and childhood can have consequences across development and into adulthood. This strengthens the case for early, child-specific responses that do not wait until trauma manifests as a health, education, behavioural or justice-system crisis.

Housing pathways should therefore consider location, schooling, accessibility, privacy, space, cultural connection and the child's own safety needs. Specialist child and youth capability should be available within housing and homelessness responses, not only specialist DFSV services. There should be increased investment in frontline services to work directly with children and young people from both a response and recovery lens. These approaches will have long-term benefits in breaking cycles and improving life-course outcomes.

How can governments, services, education settings, families, communities and others better recognise and respond to children and young people experiencing violence or harm?

Children should not be administratively invisible because they appear as dependents on an adult's case. Integrated case management should record and respond to their needs directly, with age-appropriate consent and participation. Schools, early childhood services and health services also need clearer pathways to specialist support and housing responses when violence creates immediate instability.

It is important that there is a more active role for education to be rolled out in schools for children and young people. Amplifying Voices participants advocate for programs, including programs informed by lived experience, that teach children and young people about healthy communication, respectful relationships, consent, safe touch and unsafe touch, responsible adults and siblings, and what domestic and family violence is and looks like.

These conversations should reinforce that violence, abuse and coercive control are never acceptable and help children understand that what is happening is not their fault. Children are never responsible for the violence they experience or witness, and they should feel safe to seek help and know that trusted adults and services are there to support them.

Whilst teachers should be taught the symptoms and precursors of domestic violence, there should be people responsible and mandated protocols beyond individual teachers to create a system which supports intervention and prevention for children and young people.

YWCA Australia's service delivery leaders call for additional resourcing specifically for children at schools and children as victim-survivors in their own right. They note that schools do not have sufficient supports and expertise to provide domestic and family violence supports to children. The current resourcing available with school counsellors, psychologists or social workers is insufficient. Whilst this care should be delivered within schools, it can come from outside the school with specialist services supports delivered within the school to build relationships with the children and to support them specifically on issues related to domestic, family and sexual violence.

The principle of "listen the first time" and act, is equally relevant to children and young people. When a child, parent or trusted adult identifies that a young person is not coping, services need clear escalation pathways and sufficient capacity to respond. Early intervention should reduce the depth and duration of harm, rather than requiring a child or family to reach a higher threshold of crisis before support becomes available. From YWCA Australia's experience in facilitating services to children and young people, children and young people must be heard and their needs acted upon. They should be informed and kept in the loop on what has happened as a result of what they have shared. To achieve that there must be a consistent child-focused approach across governments, services, education setting and families and communities. The **National Principles for Child Safe Organisations** should be embedded across all areas of society.

Furthermore, services should have flexibility embedded in their service design to be responsive to changing needs and be resourced to build the capacity and skills to know how to engage and respond to children and their needs. Governments can enable this through flexible design requirements and through increased funding for capacity and skill building and to support relational work.

What approaches are most effective in supporting children and young people who are using violence or displaying harmful sexual behaviours to take accountability, change behaviours, and reduce harm?

Responses should preserve accountability and victim-survivor safety while recognising developmental context and trauma. Early, therapeutic and family-aware intervention is preferable to waiting for behaviour to escalate into justice involvement and before young people become adults. From YWCA Australia's experience, it is important to ensure that children and young people receive integrated service delivery that builds connection and strengthens their relational networks. Service responses benefit from adopting a holistic approach to move away from isolation and towards addressing social and emotional development, and literacy and wellbeing.

Housing instability, family violence and disrupted care should be assessed as relevant context without excusing harmful behaviour.

How should the Second Action Plan respond to current or emerging forms of harm affecting children and young people, including technology-facilitated abuse, harmful online content, and violence within peer and dating relationships?

The Plan should fund youth-led policy design, strengthen digital literacy and safety capability across education and service systems, and ensure specialist responses understand peer and dating violence rather than applying adult intimate-partner

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models uncritically. Housing and family support services working with young people also need technology-safety capability because digital abuse can continue after physical separation.

How can children and young people be meaningfully involved in shaping the policies, programs and services that affect them?

Start by asking children and young people how they want to be involved in shaping the policies, programs and services that affect them, and centre the actions that are meaningful to them.

Participation must be ongoing, safe, developmentally appropriate and remunerated. The DFSV Commission's work on children and young people provides a strong foundation.^{xii} YWCA recommends formal youth participation within Second Action Plan implementation, complemented by funded youth-led structures such as YWCA's Young Women's Council model. Participation should include feedback loops demonstrating how advice changed decisions.

8.4 Priority Area 4 | People who use violence

In consulting across lived and service sector expertise in YWCA Australia, there was support for a specific priority area of intervention for people using violence. Across the consultations, there is a clear priority for this work noting that not all women will have the option or readiness to separate from their partner.

Young women and gender-diverse leaders at YWCA Australia also call for efforts to increase male engagement and input into the plan to ensure an uptake in change-making behaviours and care for these gendered issues of domestic, family and sexual violence.

What would make the biggest difference in preventing and responding earlier to the use of violence?

The system must shift more of the burden of prevention and accountability onto people who use violence. Earlier identification should occur across justice, health, housing, homelessness, employment and community settings, with specialist referral pathways available before violence escalates.

Amplifying Voices advocates also called for earlier intervention before harmful patterns become entrenched, particularly for children and young people beginning to use violence. Responses should identify the behaviour and the source of that behaviour, establish accountability and provide age-appropriate opportunities for change rather than assuming a young person is destined to become a perpetrator.

Housing and homelessness systems can be important points of contact but should not be expected to undertake specialist perpetrator intervention without capability and support. The Second Action Plan should invest in cross-sector recognition training and secondary consultation so adjacent systems can identify patterns, respond safely and refer effectively.

Sector specialists with experience working in men's behaviour change note a trend where users of violence fail to identify themselves as perpetrators of domestic and family violence. There is a sense of justification with perpetrators of violence that they are not engaging in domestic violence where they have identified that there is a reason that provoked them to do so in their minds. There is a false reality where perpetrators are those who use physical violence 'unprovoked' as opposed to using violence after having identified a justification for that violence. This is a dangerous distinction that is being held by perpetrators of domestic, family and sexual violence.

YWCA service specialists call for campaigns, not just directed at what women as victim-survivors but at men using violence. There needs to be a national shift in culture, conversation and community that violence against women and children is not a 'woman's issue' it is a whole-of-nation issue, and men must also be engaged in the conversation, in taking action and in changing behaviours of using violence.

Direct education to men and boys around this issue is critical. It is also important that counter-messaging is conveyed to victim-survivors that violence is never their fault and that there is never a reason or circumstance where violence against women and children is acceptable.

A program example: YWCA Australia at the DV Awareness Cup in Shoalhaven

YWCA has had success in engaging with adolescent boys and girls with red and green flag activities at an annual DV Awareness Cup organised by the Nowra Local Area Command for the Shoalhaven region. This event is expanding to the Hunter region and Kogarah and are a space for all high schools in the region to attend. The activity run by YWCA Australia showed different patterns amongst adolescents:

- There were adolescent boys that thought their behaviours were acceptable despite being red flags
- There were adolescent boys that knew their friend was engaging in red flag behaviour
- There were adolescent girls who were unaware that behaviours were red flags.

These activities and conversations are crucial because it models healthy behaviours in relationships for young people. It models what behaviours are acceptable and not acceptable for adolescent boys, it shifts other adolescent boys from the role of bystander to intervention with other adolescent boys and it teaches adolescent girls what behaviours are healthy and what behaviours are not acceptable.

How can services, families, communities, workplaces, institutions and others better recognise and respond safely to people using violence or at risk of using violence?

National practice guidance should clarify indicators of coercive control, systems abuse, technology-facilitated abuse and manipulation of services. This is particularly important because people using violence can weaponise legal, financial, housing and child protection systems to continue abuse after separation.

What approaches are most effective in supporting people who use violence to take accountability, change behaviours, and reduce the use of violence, while focusing on victim-survivor safety?

Interventions should be evidence-based, safety-led and connected to risk management. Housing policy can support accountability by enabling, where lawful and safe, victim-survivors and children to remain in the home rather than making displacement the default consequence of another person's violence. Where a person using violence is removed, access to appropriate alternative accommodation can support compliance and engagement with behaviour-change interventions, without creating an entitlement that displaces victim-survivor need.

Understanding developmental, cultural, social and trauma contexts can improve the design of interventions without excusing violence or shifting accountability away from the person using it. Responses should be sufficiently tailored to address the factors relevant to an individual's behaviour while maintaining victim-survivor safety as the overriding objective. As one victim-survivor advocate with Amplifying Voices shares, ***“People who use violence also need access to support. A holistic, trauma-informed approach is needed to understand and address the underlying causes of their behaviour, including unresolved trauma, adverse childhood experiences, substance use, mental health challenges and harmful attitudes and beliefs. Addressing these issues early can support behaviour change and help prevent future violence.”***

How can governments and services strengthen culturally safe, accessible and evidence-informed responses for a range of communities and cohorts?

For First Nations communities, accountability and behaviour-change responses should be developed through community-controlled and culturally grounded models consistent with ***Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices***. For other cohorts, program design should respond to disability, sexuality, age, language and migration context. Cultural tailoring should never dilute accountability or victim-survivor safety.

For Amplifying Voices advocates, place-based and community-led responses are essential. They call for more to be done across the community by investing in grassroots, community-led programs that are co-designed with people with lived experience and tailored to the unique needs of individual communities. Communities should be supported to have open conversations about healthy, safe and respectful relationships and encouraged to speak up when they see harmful behaviours or when they need support. Community-led initiatives, such as designing and painting murals, can also play an important role in prevention by creating opportunities for healing, education and conversations about respect, accountability and the shared responsibility to end violence.

Amplifying Voices advocates also call for greater awareness of domestic, family and sexual violence and better promotion of the services and supports available to both victim-survivors and people who use violence. Strengthening accountability means holding people who use violence responsible for their actions while also providing opportunities for meaningful behaviour change.

8.5 Priority Area 5 | System integration and workforce

What would make the biggest difference in creating a more coordinated and connected system response?

A practical “tell your story once” principle would make the greatest difference. This does not mean a single national database or unrestricted information sharing. It means coordinated case management, interoperable referral pathways, warm referrals, common practice expectations and consent-based information exchange where appropriate, so that fragmentation is not transferred to the victim-survivor as an administrative burden.

YWCA's consultation suggests a complementary principle: “listen the first time” and act. Together, these principles describe the lived experience of an integrated system. A person should not have to reach crisis repeatedly before their disclosure is acted upon, and they should not have to retell the same experience across multiple agencies in order to receive help.

DSS can make this tangible by embedding the principle in Second Action Plan implementation guidance and Commonwealth DFSV program design; funding a small number of integration demonstrators across housing and DFSV systems; and breaking consistent intergovernmental referral and information-sharing principles through National Plan governance.

What workforce capabilities, supports, or conditions are most needed to strengthen prevention, early intervention, response and recovery?

Capability must run in both directions: DFSV literacy for housing and homelessness workers, and housing and tenancy literacy for specialist DFSV workers. Services also need funded access to First Nations, disability, multicultural, LGBTIQ+ and other specialist expertise, as well as technology-safety capability and perpetrator-pattern recognition.

Workforce stability is equally important. Short contracts drive turnover, weaken relationships and reduce the capacity to undertake prevention, secondary consultation and integration work. YWCA supports five-year operational agreements as the preferred default where program maturity and commissioning context allow, with transparent indexation reflecting wage and operating costs and adequate notice of recommissioning or cessation.

DSS cannot dictate all state service contracts, but it can lead by example in Commonwealth commissioning and pursue long-term funding-duration and indexation principles through intergovernmental agreements and national workforce strategies.

What approaches or models appear most effective in improving collaboration, coordination and information sharing across services, systems and programs?

Formal partnerships work better than reliance on individual relationships. Effective integration requires defined roles, shared protocols, referral pathways, escalation mechanisms, secondary consultation and governance that survives staff turnover. Co-location can help but is not essential. The design objective should be continuity of care and shared accountability rather than organisational merger.

YWCA's consultations demonstrate that victim-survivors value services and supports which are flexible, inclusive, culturally safe and trauma-informed. A service partnership model can meet the needs of a victim-survivor to provide a holistic, wrap-around response that addresses safety, housing, health, financial security, legal needs and emotional wellbeing. This model provides an alternative to victim-survivors and families navigating multiple systems on their own and instead promotes healing, recovery and a pathway to rebuild lives with dignity.

Internationally, Domestic Violence Housing First is relevant because mobile, survivor-directed advocacy crosses organisational boundaries rather than requiring the survivor to fit a fixed program sequence.^{xi} In Australia, YWCA's integrated housing and support practice demonstrates the value of housing and specialist support being designed around the same outcome.

What supports do specialist and universal services need to provide inclusive, accessible and responsive services?

Specialist services need funding for the system work expected of them, not only direct casework. Secondary consultation, training, partnership development, data, lived experience engagement and cross-sector case coordination are real functions with real workforce costs. Universal services need funded access to that expertise rather than being expected to become specialist DFSV services themselves.

What evidence, workforce or system gaps should the Second Action Plan prioritise to strengthen implementation and improve outcomes over time?

Three gaps should be prioritised. First, linked evidence that follows housing and safety outcomes over time. Second, national visibility of workforce capacity and capability across the combined DFSV, housing and homelessness ecosystem. Third, implementation evidence showing whether system-integration reforms change the lived experience of accessing help, not only whether agencies signed protocols or attended meetings.

Lived experience should be part of the evidence architecture itself. Implementation should be assessed not only through administrative data and service outputs, but through structured, ongoing feedback from the people navigating the system. This provides an early warning mechanism when formally compliant systems are still failing in practice.

The DFSV Commission's July 2026 Monitoring and Reporting Framework is an important development because it adopts a systems-based approach rather than

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focusing primarily on activities.^{xiii} The Second Action Plan should explicitly include housing stability, economic security and system-navigation experience within the evidence base used to assess progress.

A note on funding through the National Partnership Agreement on Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence Responses

The National Partnership Agreement is an important mechanism for Federal and State and Territory governments to work together to deliver critical frontline services across the nation. Organisations like YWCA Australia rely upon funding from the National Partnership Agreement to deliver these critical services across States and Territories to women and children experiencing and at risk of domestic family and sexual violence.

Over the years, however, the National Partnership Agreement has created uncertainty at the State and Territory and service delivery level around:

- The cadence of when funding negotiations will occur and how long funding negotiations will take,
- The quantum of funding that will be available,
- The guidelines for funding usage that will be permissible.

Other circumstances to note under the National Partnership Agreement are that:

- Funding issued under the National Partnership Agreement has been for shorter-terms, such as two to three years, rather than five-year contracts.
- Funding has been pivoted to respond to unforeseen challenges and circumstances, such as COVID-19 in the context of domestic, family and sexual violence services. Whilst that is important, when funding is announced to drive certain outcomes or meet certain needs, it is coming from the same pool that is relied upon for ongoing and regular service provision which means that services have to do more with less.

Overall, the National Partnership Agreement on Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence Responses is a welcomed agreement. However, the above environment impacts the consistent delivery of domestic, family and sexual violence services to communities across Australia. This has flow on effects in the ability to recruit and retain staff and creates inefficiencies in re-hiring for positions based on insecure contract models. This has further flow on effects to the stability of service trust and engagement with community.

YWCA Australia recommends that the Second Action Plan is utilised as an opportunity to create further certainty for domestic, family and sexual violence service providers in their funding environment. This will in turn have flow on effects for the workforce and the victim-survivors that are supported by those workforces and engagements. Specific changes include:

- Creating more certainty around the cadence, quantum and guidelines for funding.
- Extending funding under the National Partnership Agreement to support five-year contracts for services.
- Ensuring that the National Partnership Agreement remains a secure pool of funding to support ongoing service delivery around the nation. When unforeseen

circumstances arise, such as COVID-19 or there is a desire to invest more heavily in certain programs and solutions, there is **additional** funding on the table. That can be by supplementing the National Partnership Agreement or having a separate funding pool for unforeseen or new investments.

8.6 Priority Area | Recovery and Healing

What evidence, workforce or system gaps should the Second Action Plan prioritise to strengthen implementation and improve outcomes over time?

YWCA Australia consulted with women with lived experience of domestic, family and sexual violence and homelessness on the topic of recovery and healing through the Amplifying Voices program. The clear message we received was the importance of housing to recovery and rebuilding:

‘Housing is one of the biggest challenges for victim-survivors. People need access to safe, stable and affordable housing that allows them to recover and rebuild their lives.’
– YWCA Australia Amplifying Voices program participant.

How and where that housing is delivered is also important to recovery and healing. The accommodation should be located in communities where people can remain connected to services, family, culture and support networks, rather than being placed in isolated locations that can increase vulnerability and disconnection.

It is important that a long-view is adopted to investing in healing and recovery beyond the immediate crisis point for victim-survivors: ***‘The biggest difference in helping people and families recover and heal after experiencing family, domestic and sexual violence is providing holistic, wrap-around support that continues beyond the immediate crisis. Recovery is a long-term journey, and people need ongoing follow-up and support to rebuild their lives safely and with dignity.’***– YWCA Australia Amplifying Voices program participant.

When delivering recovery and healing services, community and solidarity alongside deep reflective practice are essential. Victim-survivors have practical, place-based program ideas to support recovery and healing: ***‘Support services should help people understand the impacts of trauma, identify their triggers and develop healthy coping strategies and self-care practices. Connecting people with peer support groups, empowerment programs and community networks can reduce isolation and help build confidence, healing and a sense of belonging.’***– YWCA Australia Amplifying Voices program participant.

IX. International evidence

9.1 Canada | *Make gendered housing commitments visible and accountable*

[Canada's National Housing Strategy](#) targets at least 25 per cent of funding towards meeting the housing needs of women and their children. Canadian government reporting indicates that, as at June 2025, 33.7 per cent of committed National Housing Strategy funding had gone towards that objective.^{xiv} The transferable lesson is that a gendered housing commitment can be explicit, quantified and publicly reported. Canada also demonstrates the limits of targets. An expenditure target does not prove that a woman can access housing when she needs it. Australia should therefore pair any investment commitment with outcome and unmet-need measures.

9.2 United States | *Fund what survivors need to stabilise housing*

The [US Domestic Violence Housing First Demonstration Evaluation](#) examined a model combining survivor-driven mobile advocacy with flexible financial assistance for survivors experiencing homelessness or housing instability. Over 24 months, the evaluation found stronger housing stability and safety outcomes and improvements in mental health for participants receiving the model.^{xi}

The model is particularly relevant to DSS because its core service components resemble areas within DSS influence: flexible financial assistance, survivor-directed advocacy, referral and service coordination. It supports strengthening the housing interface around the Leaving Violence Program rather than assuming a support payment alone can secure long-term housing.

9.3 Aotearoa New Zealand | *National direction should enable local and culturally grounded implementation*

[Te Aorerekura National Strategy to Eliminate Family Violence and Sexual Violence](#) provides a useful whole-of-system frame through collective government responsibility, community leadership and whānau-centred approaches. Its relevance to Australia lies in the architecture namely, that national policy direction and accountability can coexist with local, culturally grounded implementation, aligning closely with Amplifying Voices' call for community-led action shaped by local context.^{xv}

9.4 Scotland | *The consequence of violence should not automatically be loss of home*

Scotland's Domestic Abuse (Protection) (Scotland) Act 2021 provides a useful model for shifting the burden of displacement from victim-survivors to people using violence. It enables action to remove a perpetrator from a social housing tenancy and, where appropriate, transfer the tenancy to the victim-survivor, allowing women and children to remain safely housed.

In Australia, tenancy law is primarily a state and territory responsibility, but the principle has national relevance. The Second Action Plan could establish an expectation that, where safe and lawful, systems prioritise perpetrator exclusion, tenancy transfer and safety upgrades over displacement of victim-survivors. DSS could use the National Plan's intergovernmental mechanisms to promote greater consistency and share effective models across jurisdictions.^{xvi}

X. Recommendations and Implementation Mechanisms

No.	Recommendation	What DSS can commit to	Whole-of-government / intergovernmental pathway	Implementation mechanism
1	Recognise housing security as a National Plan outcome and violence prevention infrastructure	Include explicit commitments in the Second Action Plan and align Commonwealth DFSV program outcomes and evaluation.	Broker a joint implementation statement with Treasury and states and territories linking the Second Action Plan to Homes for Australia and NASHH.	Include housing stability, housing safety and economic security across prevention, response and recovery actions, not only crisis accommodation.
2	Establish a rapid national pathway from violence to permanent housing	Define the National Plan outcome and commission the outcome framework.	States and territories deliver housing pathways; Treasury aligns NASHH measures; Housing Australia supports supply.	Measure time in crisis/transitional accommodation, exits to permanent housing, tenancy sustainment, repeat homelessness and unmet housing need. Avoid a single rigid maximum timeframe until baseline data and jurisdictional capacity are established.
3	Ensure funding for early intervention and prevention is commensurate to the need	Lead through additional Commonwealth investment to the National Partnership Agreement on Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence Responses ensuring that funding is increased to scale-up and deliver early intervention and primary prevention.	Lead negotiations with States and Territories to ensure that funding commitments are commensurate to the scale of need, and the impact from early intervention and prevention.	Increase funding between Commonwealth and States and Territories through the National Partnership Agreement on Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence Responses dedicated to early intervention and prevention.
4	Prioritise children and young people as clients in their own right	In recognising children and young people as victim-survivors in their own right, lead through additional Commonwealth investment into the National Partnership Agreement for service deliver for children and young people as clients in their own right. DSS can prioritise grants to services that are meaningfully centring the needs and best interests of children.	Lead negotiations with States and Territories to ensure that funding commitments meet the recognition of children as victim-survivors in their own right, and that grants prioritise services centring children as clients in their own right.	Increase funding between Commonwealth and States and Territories through the National Partnership Agreement on Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence Responses dedicated to children and young people as victim-survivors and clients in their own right.
5	Secure a gender-responsive housing investment commitment	Seek a Second Action Plan commitment that government housing investment will transparently address the needs of women, children	Treasury and Housing Australia determine program design and capital allocation.	Use Homes for Australia and future Housing Australia funding rounds to create a dedicated stream, quantified target or transparent priority mechanism, with gender-responsive

		and gender-diverse people affected by violence.		and accessible design and public reporting.
6	Connect capital to operational support	Make integrated support a National Plan policy expectation and reflect it in Commonwealth DFSV commissioning.	Treasury, Housing Australia and jurisdictions embed project-level or program-level support arrangements.	Require projects serving victim-survivors to demonstrate how necessary support will be funded and connected, while allowing credible alternative support arrangements to avoid unnecessarily delaying housing supply.
7	Strengthen survivor-directed flexible assistance and the Leaving Violence Program housing interface	Use DSS control of Leaving Violence Program policy settings and evaluation architecture to strengthen its housing interface.	Housing and local service partners provide warm referrals and longer-term pathways.	Measure housing outcomes at 6, 12 and 24 months; strengthen agency referral pathways; test flexible assistance for housing stabilisation costs; ensure handover beyond the initial 12-week period.
8	Drive longer-term, properly indexed operational funding	Lead through Commonwealth grant agreements and national funding principles.	States and territories retain responsibility for much specialist service commissioning.	Adopt five-year agreements as the preferred default where appropriate; provide transparent wage and operating-cost indexation; adequate notice for recommissioning and cessation; and funding for system coordination, not only direct casework.
9	Move lived experience into implementation governance	Fund participation and embed requirements within Second Action Plan governance.	The DFSV Commission and LEAC provide the national accountability foundation; local partners support place-based structures.	Lived experience is strengthened across the National Plan Governance mechanisms; Fund remunerated place-based implementation partnerships; publish feedback loops; support lived experience leadership capability; include young people in standing governance.
10	Support place-based responses which are co-ordinated by services and informed by lived experience	Seek Second Action Plan commitments for services to deliver co-ordinated responses to victim-survivors at the regional level, and for local action plans to be developed for communities and informed by victim-survivors.	Local service partners work with lived experience leaders in the delivery of place-based solutions.	The Second Action Plan prioritises these outputs and outcomes, funding is allocated in the National Action Plan, and States and Territories support these models.

11	Formalise the interface with Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices	Align the two national plans and related governance.	First Nations governance and ACCOs lead First Nations-specific action; mainstream portfolios retain responsibility for mainstream-system reform.	Create explicit cross-plan reporting on housing, homelessness, justice, health and child-system responsibilities; protect community-controlled funding and Closing the Gap shared decision-making. Note the important role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community-Controlled services and leaders in ensuring domestic, family and sexual violence responses for First Nations people are culturally-safe, localised and trauma-informed. This occurs in Family Safety Framework in the NT and Safety Action Meetings in NSW.
12	Implement a practical “tell your story once” principle	Establish a national implementation principle and fund integration demonstrators.	Jurisdictions and agencies implement referral, case management and information-sharing arrangements.	Develop warm-referral standards, coordinated case management, consent-based information exchange and interoperability, without creating an unrestricted single national database. Ensure that lived experience voices inform the development and execution of this process.
13	Measure outcomes, equity and system performance	Align the Second Action Plan outcomes and evaluation agenda with the DFSV Commission’s monitoring framework.	AIHW, Treasury, jurisdictions and other agencies contribute linked administrative data.	Track housing stability, economic security, repeat homelessness, repeat victimisation, tenancy sustainment, children’s recovery and system-navigation experience, with disaggregation to identify inequity.
14	Strengthen independent accountability for systemic barriers	Establish response protocols and resource the DFSV Commission’s monitoring role.	Relevant portfolio ministers and agencies respond to findings within their remit.	Require a formal, public whole-of-government response to major Commission findings on systemic implementation barriers, including housing. Set the response timeframe with the Commission and government rather than importing a timeframe from another jurisdiction.

XI. What success should look like by 2032

The Second Action Plan should be judged not only by the number of initiatives delivered, but by whether the lived reality of seeking safety changes. Success would mean:

- Fewer victim-survivors remain with or return to a person using violence because there is nowhere safe and affordable to go;
- Shorter periods of homelessness and crisis accommodation after leaving violence;
- More victim-survivors able to remain safely in their own homes where they choose;
- Fewer repeated disclosures and fewer failed referrals between disconnected systems;
- Greater economic security and tenancy sustainment after leaving;
- First Nations women and children experiencing culturally safe, community-controlled pathways alongside accountable mainstream systems;
- Children experiencing continuity of housing, education, health care and community while they recover;
- People who use violence to encounter earlier, more consistent accountability and intervention across systems; and
- Frontline workforces with the funding, capability and stability required to provide integrated, trauma- and violence-informed support.

These outcomes must be disaggregated. National averages can conceal persistent failure for people experiencing intersecting forms of discrimination and disadvantage. Government should be able to see not only whether the system is improving, but for whom it is improving and who remains excluded.

Success should also be visible to the people whose expertise informed the Plan. Victim-survivors, young people and communities should be able to identify what changed because of their participation and have an ongoing role in judging whether implementation is producing safer, more accessible and more equitable systems.

XII. Conclusion

The Second Action Plan presents an important opportunity to build on Australia's significant investment in ending gender-based violence by strengthening how policies, programs and systems work together. The next phase of implementing the National Plan can move beyond responding to violence in individual parts of the system towards a more connected approach that addresses its gendered drivers, enables safety and supports long-term recovery.

Housing is an essential part of that response, but it does not operate alone. Safe and secure housing, economic security, specialist support, gender equality and accountability for people who use violence all influence whether a victim-survivor can leave violence and remain safe afterwards. When the systems responsible for these outcomes operate separately, victim-survivors are left to navigate the gaps between them.

YWCA recommends that the Second Action Plan use the National Plan's whole-of-government and intergovernmental architecture to strengthen these connections. This includes making shared outcomes clearer, identifying responsibility where important levers sit across portfolios or jurisdictions, and strengthening accountability for whether collective investment is improving safety in practice.

The outcomes we seek are ultimately human ones. Safety is not achieved when leaving violence results in homelessness. Recovery is compromised when children experience repeated moves and disconnection from school, family and community. Nor is a response genuinely integrated when a victim-survivor must repeatedly navigate disconnected systems to secure housing, income, health care and legal support.

The expertise of people with lived experience will be critical to understanding whether this is being achieved. YWCA recommends that lived experience leadership be embedded alongside stronger whole-of-government accountability, providing an ongoing way to test whether national reform is translating into meaningful change in different communities.

The Second Action Plan offers an opportunity to connect what Australia already knows, what governments already invest in and what victim-survivors tell us they need, so that the systems intended to support safety work together to make it possible and lasting.

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- ⁱ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Specialist homelessness services annual report 2024–25, “Clients who have experienced family and domestic violence”, updated 18 November 2025. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/homelessness-services/specialist-homelessness-services-annual-report/contents/clients-who-have-experienced-fdsv>
- ⁱⁱ Australia’s National Research Organisation for Women’s Safety, Evidence to action: informing direction for the Second Action Plan, Consultation Paper, May 2026, pp. 10–12, 43–51. <https://engage.dss.gov.au/second-action-plan/consultation-paper/>
- ⁱⁱⁱ Australian Government Treasury, Homes for Australia: A National Plan, 28 May 2026. <https://treasury.gov.au/publication/p2026-773858>
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- ^v YWCA Australia, internal Second Action Plan evidence draft and consultation material, including Amplifying Voices, Young Women’s Council and Digital Activist Community insights, July 2026.
- ^{vi} YWCA Australia and Per Capita Centre for Equitable Housing, **Housing That Pays Back**, 2026.
- ^{vii} Australian Government Department of Social Services, Working together to achieve change: National Plan governance arrangements, 4 December 2025.
- ^{viii} Australian Government Department of Social Services, Leaving Violence Program, updated 1 July 2026. <https://www.dss.gov.au/safety-programs-prevention-and-evidence/leaving-violence-program>
- ^{ix} Cataldo, M., Martin, R., Ballantyne, P., Hayes, S., & Dole, K. (2026). On Our Own Terms: Emerging insights report. Systems change through Lived Experience Leadership – unearthing practices and possibilities of lived experience-led change. RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia, 9.
- ^x See McKercher, KA. (2026) **Continuing the ‘co’ past development**, available at: <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/continuing-co-past-development-ka-mckercher-jvprc>
- ^{xi} U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, Domestic Violence Housing First Demonstration Evaluation, 24-month findings.
- ^{xii} Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission, children and young people engagement and reporting contributing to the Second Action Plan, June 2026.
- ^{xiii} Australian Government, **Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices: National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Plan to End Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence 2026–2036**, DSS Ministers media release, 10 February 2026.
- ^{xiv} Government of Canada, National Housing Strategy reporting on the target for at least 25 per cent of funding to meet the housing needs of women and their children; as at June 2025, 33.7 per cent of committed funding reported against this objective.
- ^{xv} Te Puna Aonui, Te Aorerekura: National Strategy to Eliminate Family Violence and Sexual Violence, and Te Aorerekura Action Plan 2025–2030, Aotearoa New Zealand. <https://tepunaaonui.govt.nz/national-strategy>.
- ^{xvi} Scottish Government, Domestic Abuse – Social Housing Tenancy Provisions: Statutory Guidance for Social Landlords, 8 June 2026; Supporting domestic abuse victims to stay in their homes, 10 January 2026. <https://www.gov.scot/publications/domestic-abuse-social-housing-tenancy-provisions-statutory-guidance-social-landlords/>

Appendix: Amplifying Voices Assessment of Interventions and Strategies Paper

The following document is provided by YWCA Australia's lived experience advocacy group in Darwin, Northern Territory, Amplifying Voices. The paper responds to the key problem statement that women experiencing Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence, struggle to access safe, clear and coordinated support, leaving many to navigate systems alone and face ongoing violence and trauma.

The advocates have identified key themes, root problems and causes, the impacts on women and children, and practical solutions to address barriers to accessing support.

Meeting 14: Interventions & Strategies

Goal / Key Problem Statement

Women experiencing Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence, struggle to access safe, clear and coordinated support, leaving many to navigate systems alone and face ongoing violence and trauma.

Key Theme	Root Problems (Causes)	Impacts on Women & Children	Strategies / Solutions / Better Support (Workshopped Ideas)
1. Clear Pathways & Information	• No clear signs on where to go for help • Lack of coordinated referral pathways • Confusing systems and processes • Long waitlists and delays • Women must navigate systems alone	• Women stop seeking help midway • Uncertainty and hesitation • Fear of seeking help • Feeling lost and unsupported • Continued exposure to violence • Systems are exhausting to	• Establish a DFSV one-stop hub with wrap-around services. • Develop a statewide website linking organizations and accommodation options. • Create an app or QR code system searchable by postcode. • Increase visibility of information through flyers and posters. • Display discreet support info in safe spaces (e.g., bathroom doors).

		navigate when women are already depleted.	• Improve interpreter services access.
2. Police, Courts & Justice Response	• Misidentification of Person Using Violence (PUV) • Mandatory reporting fears • Coercive control difficult to prove • Victims not believed • Inconsistent legal protection • Power imbalance in justice systems • Limited DFSV training	• Intimidation by systems • Survivors silenced • Fear reporting worsens violence • System manipulation by perpetrators • No early intervention	• Increase trauma-informed DFSV training for police and courts. • Prioritize victim protection over conflict mediation. • Increase availability of female officers at incidents. • Develop consistent justice system guidance. • Review legislation addressing misidentification. • Improve education on financial abuse. • Increase funding for early intervention. • Review Leaving Violence Payments based on need. • Support employment pathways for survivors.

3. Housing & Safe Support Services	• Limited safe housing options • Service waits times • Confidentiality risks in small communities • Lack of coordinated safe support	• Housing instability • Women remain unsafe • Social isolation • Delayed recovery	• Provide coordinated wrap-around housing support. • Increase safe and affordable housing availability. • Streamline access to financial, legal and counselling services. • Review housing eligibility reassessments. • Strengthen confidentiality protections.
4. Community Safety & Cultural Barriers	• Small communities where perpetrators are known • Fear of retaliation • Lack of transport • Cultural expectations and discrimination • Limited community support	• Silence continues • Social isolation • Fear to speak up • Increased surveillance • Women feel unsafe accessing services	• Provide DFSV materials in local languages. • Use lived-experience voices for culturally appropriate awareness. • Support community-led prevention initiatives. • Invest in outreach transport services (e.g., community buses).

5. Financial & Practical Barriers	• High cost of leaving violence • Economic dependency • Limited sustainable funding • Practical barriers accessing services	• Women unable to leave • Emotional and financial exhaustion • Delayed help-seeking • Ongoing trauma	• Increase financial assistance packages. • Expand financial counselling and emergency support. • Improve sustainable funding for frontline services. • Provide childcare, transport and flexible service access.
6. Training, Awareness & System Understanding	• DV viewed only as physical violence • Red flags ignored • Lack of DFSV training across sectors • Limited understanding of coercive control • Systems not trauma-informed	• Survivors not recognized or believed • Late intervention • Continued silencing • Ineffective responses • Judgement when seeking help	• Implement mandatory statewide DFSV training standards. • Deliver prevention education in schools, workplaces and community groups. • Develop national-style awareness campaigns. • Promote understanding of coercive control. • Embed trauma-informed practice across sectors.

Other / Cross-System Issues	• Cycles of violence identified but not interrupted • Early warning signs missed • Women blamed for remaining • Custody issues overshadow violence concerns	• Intergenerational trauma continues • Women discouraged from reporting • Children remain exposed to violence	• Strengthen early intervention responses. • Improve coordinated child protection responses. • Respect victim choice and autonomy. • Expand wrap-around services for families. • Develop a centralized DFSV services website.
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